



The IMAGES of PARADISE

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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SYNOPSIS.

Scarlett, an American soldier of fortune in the employ of the French Imperial Police at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, is ordered to arrest John Buckhurst, a leader of the Communists and suspected of being a spy. The French crown jewels, while searching for Buckhurst, are ordered to arrest Countess de Vassart and her son, a socialist and enemy of the Communists. Buckhurst, disguised as a peasant and carrying her to La Trappe, where the Countess and her friends are assembled. He is arrested by the French soldiers and taken to a fatal fall from the roof of the house. He denounces Buckhurst as the leader of the Reds and the Communists and conducts him to where Buckhurst is secreted.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

Buckhurst looked at me with long enough to see that the end of his rope had come. Then he slowly turned his dead eyes on the girl before him. Scarlett to the roots of her hair, she stood there, utterly stunned. Then the sudden darkness of the room, the hoofs broke out along the avenue below, and through the red sunset I saw a dozen horsemen come eampering up the drive toward us. At the same moment I stepped out into the driveway to signal the riders, raising my hand.

Instantly a pistol flashed—then another and another, and a dozen harsh voices shouted: "Houura! Houura! Preussen!"

"Mille tonnerres!" roared Delmont; "the Prussians are here!"

"Look out! Stand back! Get the women back!" I cried, as an Uhlman wheeled his horse straight through a bed of geraniums and fired his horse-pistol at me.

Delmont dragged the young Countess to the shelter of a door. Sylvia Elvins and Tavernier followed; Buckhurst ran to the carriage and leaped in.

"No resistance!" bellowed Delmont, as Bazarid snatched up the pistol I had taken from Buckhurst. But the invalid had already fired at a horseman, and had gone down under the merciless hoofs with a lance through his face.

My first impulse was to shoot Buckhurst, and I started for him. I ran past Bazarid's trampled body and fired at an Uhlman who had seized the horses which were attached to the carriage where Buckhurst sat.

Again I ran around the wagon, through a clump of syringa bushes, and up the stone steps to the terrace, and after my gallop one of those comparable comrade riders—an Uhlman in rest, setting his wry little horse to the stone steps with a loud "Houura!"

It was too steep a grade for the gallant horse. I flung my pistol in the animal's face and the poor brute reared straight up and fell backward, rolling over and over with his unfortunate rider, and falling with a tremendous splash into the pool below.

"In God's name stop that!" roared Delmont from below. "Give up, Scarlett! They mean us no harm!"

"Come down, Hussar!" called an officer. "We respect your uniform."

"Will you parley?" I asked, listening intently for the gallop of my promised gendarmes. If I only gain time and save Buckhurst.

"Foules-fous rendez-vous! Out on non!" shouted the officer, in his terrible French.

"Et bien, . . . non!" I cried, and ran for the door. I gained the doorway they shot at me, but I only fled the faster, springing up the stairs. Here I stood, saber in hand, ready to stop the first man.

Up the stairs rushed three Uhlmen, sabers shining in the dim light from the window behind me. I laid my forefinger flat on the blade of my saber and shortened my arm for a thrust—then there came a blinding flash, a roar, and I was down, trying to rise, until a clinched fist struck me in the face and I fell flat on my back.

They got me out to the terrace, and carried me to the lawn. One of the men brought a cup of water from the pool.

"Here! Rittmeister!" I said, faintly, "I had a prisoner here; he should be in the carriage. Is he?"

The officer walked briskly over to the carriage. "Nobody here but two women and a scared peasant!" he called out.

Two soldiers lifted me again and bore me away in the darkness. I was perfectly conscious.

And all the while I was listening for the gallop of my gendarmes, not that I cared very much, now that Buckhurst was gone.

Suddenly a chapel bell of La Trappe rang out a startling peal; the Prussian captain shouted: "Stop that! Shoot every civilian in the house!" But the Uhlmen, who rushed up the terrace, found the great doors bolted and the lower windows screened with steel shutters.

On the battlements of the south wing a red radiance grew brighter; somebody had thrown wood into the iron basket of the ancient beacon, and set fire to it.

"That teaches me a lesson!" bawled the enraged Rittmeister, shaking his fist at the brightening alarm signal.

An Uhlman laid a heavy hand on the shoulder of the listening Countess; she tried to draw back, but he pushed her brutally into the carriage, and she stumbled and fell into the cushions beside me.

Fever had already begun to turn my head; the jolting of the carriage brought me to my senses at times. If I could only have faintly, but I could not, and the agony grew so intense that I bit my lip through to choke the scream that strained my throat.

Once—I was, I think, very near day-break—I came out of a dream in which I was swimming through oceans of water, drinking as I swam. The carriage had stopped.

"Are you suffering?" came a low voice, close to my ear.

"Madame, could I have a little water?" I asked.

Very gently she laid me back. I was entirely without power to move below my waist, or to support my body.

She filled my cap with river water and held it while I drank. After I had my fill she bathed my face, passing her wet hands through my hair and over my eyes. The carriage moved on and I fainted.

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"Parbleu, in Morabroun! Can't you hear the orchestra, sim-bam-zim! The Prussians are playing their Wagner music for us. Here, swallow this. How do you feel now?"

"Sleepy. Did you say a day or two, doctor?"

"I said a week or two—perhaps longer. I'll look into this evening. If I'm not up to my chin in amputations, take these every hour if in pain. Go to sleep, my son."

As I lay there on my long, cushioned couch, burning with that insupportable heat which, to thoroughly appreciate, one must be wounded, the door opened and a Turco soldier came into the room and advanced toward me on tiptoe.

I beckoned him, and the tall, broad fellow came up, smiling, showing his snowy, pointed teeth under a crisp beard.

"Water, Mustapha," I motioned with stiffened lips, and the fellow followed with his blue water-bottle and set it to my burning mouth.

"Merci, mon brave!" I said. "May you dwell in Paradise with All, the fourth Caliph, the Lion of God!"

The Turco stared, muttered the Tekbir in a low voice, bent and kissed my hands.

"Where was once an officer of our African battalions?" he asked, in the Arab tongue.

"Sous-officier of spahi cavalry," I said, smiling. "And you are a Kabyle mountaineer from Constantine, I see."

"It is true as I recite the fatha," cried the great fellow, beaming on me.

The music of his long-forgotten tongue refreshed me; old scenes and memories of the camp at Oran, the never-to-be-forgotten cavalry with the scarlet cloaks, rushed on me thick and fast; incidents, trivial matters of the bazaars, faces of comrades dead, came to me in flashes. My eyes grew moist, my throat swelled. I whispered: Give me a drink, in God's name!

Again he held up the blue water-bottle. After a moment I said: "Is it a battle or a boucoule? But I need not ask: the canon tell me enough. Are they storming the heights, Mustapha?"

"Macache comprendi," said the soldier, dropping into patois. "There is a battle and a cannon here. There is a heap of bricks."

"Do you insist on staying by that loop-hole?" she asked, without a quiver in her voice.

"Yes, I do," said I. "Will you go to the door?"

"No," she said, shortly. "I saw her walk toward the rear of the room, hesitate, sink down by the edge of the bed and lay her face in the pillow."

Shells rained fast on Morabroun; nearer and nearer bellowed the guns; the plaster ceiling above my head cracked and fell in thin flakes, filling the room with an acrid, smutting dust. Down the street a dull sound came; a steady roar; the Turcos dropped pick and shovel and seized their rifles.

"Garde! Garde a vous!" rang their startled bugles; the tumult increased to a swelling uproar, shouting, cheering, the crash of shutters and of glass.

"The Prussians!" bellowed the captain. "The Prussians—charge!"

His voice was lost; a yelling mass of soldiers burst into view; spiked helmets and bayonets glittering through the smoke, the Turcos were whirled about like bright butterflies in a tornado; the fusillade swelled to a stupefying din, exploding in one terrible crash; and, wrapped in lightning, the Prussian onset passed.

From the stairs below came the sound of a voiceless struggle, the trample and clanking and clicking of steel, till of a sudden a voice burst out into a dreadful screaming. A shot followed—silence—another shot—then the stairs outside shook under the rush of mounting men.

As the door behind me opened I felt a touch on my arm; the Countess de Vassart stood erect and pale, one slender, protecting hand resting lightly on my shoulder; a Lieutenant of Prussian infantry confronted us.

"I do not know you, monsieur!" he said to me, in excellent French, "because there has been no firing from the windows in this village. Otherwise—other measures. Be at ease, madame, I shall not harm your invalid."

Under the window strident Prussian bugles were blowing a harsh summons; the young officer stepped to the loop-hole and looked out, then hastily

removed his helmet and thrust his blood head through the smoky aperture. "March those prisoners in below!" he shouted down.

A moment later came a trample of feet on the landing outside, the door was flung open, and three prisoners were brutally pushed into the room.

"I tried to turn and look at them; they stood in the dusk near the bed, but I could only make out that one was a Turco, his jacket in rags, his canvas breeches covered with mud."

Again the lieutenant came to the loop-hole and looked out, then shook his head, motioning the soldiers back.

"It is too high and the arc of fire too limited," he said, shortly. "Detail four men to hold the stairs, ten men and a sergeant in the room below, and a close row of small steel ball buttons trim the left side of the blouse. A girde of black chiffon is crushed about the waist, and the sash ends are tied in a bow at the hem of the tunic in back."

The tunic is gathered at the waist and at the lower edge and given a heading of itself as a finish. Another row of steel buttons is started from over the right hip and describes a line down that side, slanting a little toward the front.

In such a gown as this its main attraction lies in the draping. In all with ends which buckle on to the sides of the seat.

I pierce a set of eight slits, each one an inch long, arranged in sets of two, one above the other, and a couple of inches apart across the front of the strap. Then I get four small slits and a close row of small steel ball buttons trim the left side of the blouse.

The other end of each ribbon is passed through one of the double slits in the strap, so that the toys dangle in front of baby, ready for him to play with while he is out.

If the ribbons are secured with a wee bow the playthings can be untied and fresh ones substituted at will, and half a dozen extra toys, each one fitted with a ribbon strap, might accompany the outfit.

The same idea can be satisfactorily carried out for a baby's cradle by substituting a length of pink or blue ribbon for the strap, and getting woolly toys to dangle from blue baby ribbon strings within reach of the tiny fingers, a small wooden rattle, a very bright-hued ball, a fluffy rabbit, and a bone ring for biting, the narrow ribbons from which the toys are suspended being sewn, at short distances apart, onto the wider ribbon, which must be provided with long enough ends to allow of their being tied to either side of the cradle.—Exchange.

"I ought to," she said, faintly amused. "I was born in this blood. It was to this house that I desired to come before my exile."

After a silence I said, "I wish I could look out of the window."

"How dreadful the cannonade is growing," she said. "Wait! don't think of moving! I will push you close to the window, where you can see."

Lying there, watching the slow shades crawling over the side of the hill, I had been for some minutes thinking of my friend Mr. Buckhurst, when I heard the young Countess stirring in the room behind me.

"You are not going to be a cripple?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Oh no, indeed!" said I.

"Nor die?" she added, seriously.

"How could a man die with an angel straight from heaven to guard him? Pardon, I am only grateful, not imperious. I looked at her humbly, and she looked at me without the slightest expression.

"Are you English, Monsieur Scarlett?" she asked quietly.

"American, madame."

"And yet you take service under an emperor?"

"I have taken harder service than that."

"Of necessity?"

"Yes, madame."

"The invasion has begun," I said.

Her face was expressionless, save for the brightness of her eyes.

Suddenly a company of pioneers arrived on the double-quick, halted, fell out, and began to break down the locked doors of the houses on either side of the street. At the same time Prussian infantry came hurrying past, dragging behind them dozens of vehicles, long hay-wagons, gardeners' carts, heavy wheelbarrows, even a single private carriage, with tarnished lamps, rocking slowly on rusty springs.

The soldiers wheeled these wagons into a double line, forming a complete chain across the street, where the Turcos had commenced to dig their ditch and breastworks—a barricade high enough to check charges, and cunningly arranged, too, for the wooden abatis could not be seen from the eastern end of the street, where a charge of French infantry or cavalry must enter Morabroun if it entered at all.

A colonel of infantry, splendidly mounted, drew bridle before our loop-hole and looked up at the officers on the roof across the way.

"Attention, you up there!" he shouted. "Is it infantry?"

"No," I bawled an officer, hollowed hand to his chest. "It's their brigade of heavy cavalry coming like an earthquake!"

"The cuirassiers!" I cried, electrified. "It's Michel's cuirassiers, madame! And—oh, the barricade!" I groaned, twisting my fingers in help.

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